Nova Scotia
Advisory Council
on the Status of
Women

Conseil consultatif
sur la condition
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SUBMISSION TO
THE DARTMOUTH TASK FORCE
ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Nova Scotia Advisory Council
on the Status of Women
P.O. Box 745
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The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes this opportunity to appear before the City of Dartmouth Task Force on Violence Against Women.

In an era of increasing violence against women in our homes, workplaces, and communities, when we have more than enough work to do merely dealing with the victims of violence against women, we commend the preventative approach that is being undertaken in this Task Force. We look forward, along with all of the citizens of Dartmouth, to the implementation of progressive recommendations to make the city a safer place for women to live and work. We hope that other municipalities in Nova Scotia will follow on the heels of this important initiative to ensure that women are free from violence.

We are all aware of the statistics on sexual harassment, sexual assault, battering, and femicide. Such statistics serve a useful purpose—to demonstrate how widespread and pervasive the problem of violence against women is—but we must get beyond the statistics in seeking real solutions to a problem which by all accounts is increasing in our society.

At the Advisory Council, we deal with the violence in women's lives on a daily basis. We are called by women who are offended by T-shirts showing an axe-wielding monster, declaring "Used to love her, but...." We are called by women in non-traditional careers who are repeatedly asked to exceed the performance of their male co-workers, and want to know if this constitutes sexual harassment. We

are called by women who have been sexually abused by their physician or dentist or lawyer. We are called by women who fear for their lives and the lives of their children if they cannot find a safe house in which to hide from their male partners. We are called by women violated by a social system which treats women as less deserving than men, and some women, such as single mothers, low-income women, minority women, as less deserving than other kinds of women.

In addition to the women who experience violence in their lives directly, and who hope that we can help them in some concrete way, either in the provision of information, advocacy, or appropriate referral, we read daily about the violence in the lives of other Nova Scotian, Canadian, and International women who experience violence in their lives. We clip and file these stories of violence, and we help individuals access this information and try to make sense of the pain, suffering, and sometimes terror of
countless women.

Unfortunately, much of the business of our office and our fieldwork program is focused on violence against women.

No program or initiative will be able to completely eliminate violence against women in our society, short of major changes that restructure the institutions of our society. But the City of Dartmouth can implement positive and effective changes that will help to reduce the number of victims of violence, and assist those who have been victimized heal.

The Advisory Council recommends:

- That, as has been recommended by film maker Gerry Rogers, a committee be formed to conduct a "safety audit" of the city where extra lighting, emergency phone boxes, etc. are needed, and implement the recommendations;

- That the City of Dartmouth develop and implement a sexual harassment policy, and encourage businesses set up within the municipality to do likewise;

- That a city-sponsored program in all area schools be implemented with the aim of providing girls and young women, and boys and young men with information and a forum for discussion about violence against women, dating abuse issues and negotiating skills. In addition, young men need to learn that violent behaviour of any kind is unacceptable, and young women need to learn that such bel aviour in their dating relationships and friendships is neither normal nor tolerable;

- That a drop-in centre or clinic accessible to the high schools be set up to provide education, counselling, advocacy and other support services for the prevention and amelioration of dating abuse, sexual assault and sexual harassment of young women;

- That the City of Dartmouth ensure that all women in the community receive an adequate income so that no woman need feel she must stay in an abusive relationship for economic reasons. In other words, municipal social assistance rates must truly provide for a woman and her family, and should include an effective and sensitive re-training or re-entry program so women who need it can find appropriate work, and that access to public housing be improved;

- That a public education program for businesses in the municipality be designed to help them recognize the economic impediment to women's advancement;

- That a transition house be set up in Dartmouth for women and their children needing safety from abusive relationships.;

- That women who do not or cannot access transition houses need alternative services such as outreach and counselling, and further that funding be provided to support these programs;

- That a counselling program for batterers and sexual abusers of women and children, aimed at preventing repeat assaults in the community, be funded by the City, and that these programs include a drug and alcohol treatment component;

- That the Dartmouth City police response to sexual or physical assault, or other forms of violence against women, be sensitive to women's needs and treat such complaints with the seriousness they deserve. Staff training for all police personnel must be a high priority; and

- That the City of Dartmouth develop an on-going network of community groups and agencies working to end violence against women, with adequate funding to support their work.